CHRIST IN THE TABERNACLE

by

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CHAPTER THREE

THE COURT AND THE GATE

Christ — The Way to a Holy God Exodus 27:918; 38:920

SURROUNDING the tabernacle was a rectangular-shaped court, open to the heavens, with only one entrance, which was the gate on the east. The court was one hundred cubits long, and fifty cubits wide, and was made of "fine twined linen" hung upon upright pillars of brass, which were fastened in sockets of brass (Exodus 27:10). The hooks and fillets at the top of the pillars were made of silver; and from these hooks the white linen "hangings" were fastened. There were fifty-six of these pillars: twenty on the south, twenty on the north, ten on the west, and three on each side of the gate on the east. The pillars and hangings stood more than eight feet high; taller than a man. Thus there was no way, by which to enter the court, except through the gate; for the brass, the white linen, and the silver stood between the outsider and those who were within.

The gate was a beautiful hanging of "blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework" (Exodus 27:16). It was hung by silver hooks upon four pillars, which were fastened in sockets of brass. "The overlaying of" the "chapiters" of the pillars was of "silver; and all the pillars of the court were filleted with silver" (Exodus 38:17).

The description of the pattern for the court and the gate is found in Exodus 27:9-18; that of the finished work, in 38:9-20.

Let us read these two passages very carefully, in order to fix in our minds the details presented. Every item is significant, or else the Holy Spirit would not have included it in the sacred record. And the picture before us points on to Christ Jesus, our Lord.

It is very evident that the gate was a type of Christ, the only Way to God. And we shall see in this study today that the white linen hanging of the court portrayed the righteous demands of a holy God, who Himself bore the penalty of sin, even Christ, our Righteousness.

- Brass speaks to us of judgment;
- Silver, of redemption.

He judged our sins at His cross, redeeming us with His own precious blood.

The lesson before us, therefore, is filled with rich and beautiful truth concerning our salvation in Christ Jesus, the Lord. As we bear in mind that God Himself dwelt in the Holy of Holies, in the Shekinah Glory; that the only access to His presence was through the only gate; and that the very pieces of furniture leading from that gate to the pillar of cloud and fire were laid out in the form of a cross — then we begin to see something of what God was teaching His people through this beautiful object lesson of the tabernacle in the wilderness.

May we let the Holy Spirit show us today some of these precious truths concerning our Saviour and His great salvation.

THE COURT

1. The "Fine Twined Linen" Hangings — A Type of Christ, Our Righteousness.

The white linen hangings of the court speak to us of a twofold aspect of God's holiness:

- (1) That righteousness which He requires of all who stand in His presence;
- (2) that righteousness which He Himself is in His sinless Person.

Our holy God cannot bear the presence of sin; but in matchless love He provides a righteousness for every sinner who will receive it as a free gift of His grace.

Sometimes we hear men say, out of foolish, darkened hearts, such words as these, "A God of love will not send a man to hell." It is true that our God is the God of love; and it is also true that He is "**not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance**" (II Peter 3:9). Moreover, it is true that sinful man sends himself to hell if he refuses the only way of salvation.

Heaven would not be heaven if sin could enter there. Nor could the sinner endure the blaze of glory that shines in that city of God! The Bible tells us plainly that, when Jesus comes back to earth, to purify the world of sin, the wicked will cry out in agony of soul, saying unto "the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Revelation 6:1517).

Our holy God must require righteousness of all who live in His presence.

In the opening chapters of Paul's Epistle to the Romans we see the whole world, Jew and Gentile, standing on trial, as it were, before the court of heaven; and the verdict is, "Guilty." "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God . . . There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10, 23).

In the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan God's people were encamped around the beautiful tabernacle.

Inside, in the Holy of Holies, He stood, veritably "in the midst." But barring all access to His holy presence, except through the one gate, hung a white curtain of "fine twined linen." It was too high for one to pass over; there were no loopholes, no other openings. The penalty was death to all who might seek to enter by some other way than that of God's provision, through the gate.

Christ is the Gate, the Way into "the holiest of all." "There is none other name under heaven given among men, where by we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The self-righteous may try to get to heaven by their own "good works," so-called, by their own moral lives or benevolent deeds.

But God's Word cannot be broken, and He has told us in a thousand ways, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).

For a man to get to heaven by the deeds of the law, by his own good works, he would have to keep every jot and tittle of that holy standard of our holy God; and that is impossible; for "all have sinned."

Christ Jesus is the only One who ever did or ever could keep that law perfectly. He did it because He was God. His sinless life met every requirement. And He kept His holy law for all who will accept the free gift He offers, "without money and without price."

"Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

He has broken God's law; he is not guiltless. A man need not commit every crime in the calendar, in order to be placed behind prison bars. Let him break one law of the land, and he deserves punishment.

But sinful man has broken all of God's law; even man's own self-righteousness, his own good works, are compared by the Lord to "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

The wonder of it is that, once the self-righteous sinner sees by faith a glimpse of Calvary's Cross, he no longer tries to make himself fit for the presence of a holy God.

- He asks the Lord Jesus to create in him a clean heart.
- He abhors himself, as Job did.
- He sees himself as "the chief of sinners," as did Paul.
- He cries out with Isaiah, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5).
- He acknowledges that all his own efforts and all his own "**righteousnesses are as filthy rags**" in the sight of the God of holiness and love.

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5, 6).

Not even Satan himself can justly accuse God of unrighteousness, of injustice, in setting His standard of holiness, His requirements of sinners, on so high a plane; for God Himself is the sinner's righteousness. He Himself paid the penalty for sin; and by His holy life He vindicated His holy law. For verily He was without sin!

He was born of the Holy Spirit, of the Virgin Mary. Because He was God, as well as Man, He could not sin. He let Satan tempt Him, not to see if He could withstand temptation, but to prove to angels, men, and demons that He could not sin. He went about doing good, teaching the profound Word of God, proving by His miracles that He was God. Even in His trial and death they found no fault in Him. His body "saw no corruption," but was raised in power and great glory. And He lives forevermore — Jesus Christ, our Righteousness!

The Father looks upon all who have put their faith in His cleansing blood as justified from the penalty of a broken law. He imputes Christ's righteousness to the believer's account. That is grace; but it is more; it is grace bestowed with justice. His holy law has been vindicated and magnified, even while the sinner has been justified and pardoned.

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21).

The "fine twined linen" that formed the court of the tabernacle spoke eloquently of all that God is in His sinless, spotless Person; and of all that He requires of the sinner who would enter into His holy presence unafraid and unashamed. His love provided a gate. In front of that gate was the altar, where the sacrifice was slain. Beyond that altar He stood in His glorious presence, ready to save, ready to hear! Christ is the Gate; Christ is the Altar; Christ is the Priest. And by the blood of His Cross He has opened up the "way into the holiest of all" — forever!

The white linen hanging that surrounded the court of the tabernacle also served as a constant reminder to the sinning Israelite that God's dwelling place is holy. Sin separates the sinner from God. But the Lord provided a gate and an altar; therefore, He was often reminding His people to live apart from the heathen, godless world. The key words of Leviticus are, "Ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2).

The Jewish tabernacle is a type of the church, as well as a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus "in the midst" of His redeemed. We, too, are exhorted by the Holy Spirit to a life of separation from the godless, Christ-rejecting world. Peter quotes the words of Leviticus, saying, "It is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Peter 1:16). And Paul reminds us that our bodies are "the temple of the Holy Ghost" (I Corinthians 6:19). Let us keep God's temple clean, by His power and grace — clean from all that would defile it and bring dishonor to His name.

2. The Pillars and Sockets of Brass — A Figure of Christ, Our Sin Bearer.

The altar of burnt offering, where the blood was shed and the sacrifice was made unto God, was covered with brass. The laver, where the priests washed their hands and feet before entering the holy place, was made of solid brass.

At the altar sin was judged; at the laver daily defilement was cleansed. And both altar and laver were of brass. Thus it becomes very clear that brass speaks to us of judgment. And in the court we see also a picture of sin judged by Christ, our Sin Bearer; for the brass pillars that upheld the linen hangings were erected in sockets of brass.

On the desert sand the sockets were placed; and in the sockets, the pillars. The white linen hangings, which remind us of our righteousness in Christ, rested upon that which typified sin judged at the cross. Apart from Calvary, there could be no righteousness for us! In the desert sands of the wilderness, which is this godless world, the gift of God's righteousness to us is sure and eternal because it rests upon His finished work of redemption.

Christ came into the world to die for sinners, even as He said to Nicodemus.

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14, 15).

When the Lord Jesus spoke these words to Nicodemus, He did not need to explain that the serpent which Moses lifted up in the wilderness was made of brass. Nicodemus knew that story, for he was a ruler of the Jews, well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures. He was familiar with the record found in Numbers 21:59.

Israel had sinned, had despised the bread from heaven, which typified Christ, the Bread of Life.

Therefore, the Lord had sent fiery serpents among them, and many died. When they confessed their sin, and when Moses prayed for them, the Lord told Moses to make a serpent of brass and to set it upon a pole. Whosoever looked at it would live — not whosoever did any kind of work or righteous deed, but whosoever looked!

The serpent speaks to us of the curse of sin; brass, of judgment. When our Lord was crucified, He became a curse for us; "for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13).

As the Israelite who looked at the brazen serpent lived, even so all who look to Jesus "**lifted up**" on the accursed tree shall have everlasting life. Not those who seek to obtain salvation by the deeds of the law, but those who look by faith shall live. At the cross the penalty of our sin was judged once for all.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

3. The Hooks and Chapiters of Silver — Symbolic of Christ, Our Redeemer.

The white linen hangings that formed the court were hung upon the pillars by hooks of silver; and the chapiters of the pillars were ornamented with silver. This silver was a part of the redemption money given by the children of Israel.

When the census was taken for the soldiers in Israel, and those "twenty years old and upward" were numbered, each one had to "give a ransom for his soul unto the Lord... half a shekel" of silver as "an offering unto the Lord, to make an atonement" for his soul (Exodus 30:11-16). This money was to be used "for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation," as "a memorial unto the children of Israel before the Lord."

Before an Israelite could be a soldier for God's people, he had to present unto the Lord "a ransom for his soul." Before we can become soldiers of the cross, we must be redeemed by the blood of the Son of God.

The Israelite looked up to the beautiful tops of the pillars and saw the atonement money. We look up, "**unto Jesus**," and by faith we see the nail-scarred hands and feet and the wounded side. And we thank Him for paying so costly a price as a ransom for our souls!

That this redemption money was only a type, is evident from Peter's reference to it many centuries later; for through him the Holy Spirit interpreted its significance, saying, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:18, 19).

Thus the atonement money in Israel was a picture of our redemption through Christ Jesus, our Lord. God made it very clear to Moses that this silver was to be used in the service of the tabernacle, even as we read again in Exodus 38:25-28.

As we shall see from a later study, the boards of the tabernacle itself rested in sockets of silver made from this redemption money. Exodus 38:28 tells us that Moses took from it a "thousand seven hundred seventy and five shekels" and "made hooks for the pillars, and overlaid their chapiters, and filleted them."

It must have been an impressive sight — to behold the pillars of brass in sockets of brass, the white linen hangings fastened by hooks of silver, and the ornamental silver chapiters above — all glistening in the sunlight! But how much more impressive is the sight of the God of glory, the spotless Lamb of Calvary, bearing our sins in His own body on the tree — Christ, our Righteousness, our Sin Bearer, our Redeemer!

THE GATE

1. The Beautiful Hanging.

There was no color in the hanging that formed the court; but the gate was made of "blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework."

The fine white linen was woven with the beautiful colors, all of which speaks to us of the Lord Jesus, who is Himself the Way to God. The hanging over the gate was of the same material as that which made the door of the tabernacle, the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, and the covering that went over the tabernacle and was seen from the inside.

There were four of these coverings, which formed the roof of the tent; but the one which the priests could see as they looked up was the fine linen curtain with the blue, purple, and scarlet, woven with the fine twined linen.

All of these — the hangings that made the gate, the door, the veil, and the curtain above the tabernacle — foreshadowed the Person and work of Christ. Moreover, the gate, the door, and the veil had this in common, that they opened the way into the presence of God.

- The gate gave entrance to the brazen altar and the laver, where sin was dealt with at the foot of the cross, as it were.
- The door led the priests into the place of communion and fellowship with God through prayer and a ministry which pointed on to Christ, the Light of the World and the Bread of Life.
- The veil opened the way into the Holy of Holies, which was a type of heaven itself, God's eternal dwelling place.

In all of these hangings and in the curtain above:

- The fine twined linen speaks to us of Christ's perfect humanity;
- The blue, of His deity;
- The scarlet, of His sacrifice;
- The purple, of His Kingly authority.
- Blue is the color that reminds us of heaven; it is the color of the sky; and our Lord came down from heaven to dwell among men, in order that He might become our Saviour.

Because He was "God manifest in the flesh," "Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us," the virgin-born Son of God, He was able to be our sinless Substitute on the cross and our risen Lord Jesus. But God can not die: therefore, He became a Man, in order that He might "taste death" for the sinner.

In the scarlet color we see the symbol of His sacrifice; for does it not remind us of His shed blood? He could purchase us with His atoning blood only because He was Man, as well as God.

Now purple is a mixture of blue and red; and the purple in the fine twined linen that made the gate, the door, the veil, and the curtain of the tabernacle speaks to us of our Lord's deity manifest in the flesh; for truly He was the God-Man. Purple is the symbol of royalty; and one of His beautiful names is that of King of kings and Lord of lords.

The fine twined linen in these hangings reminds us of His sinless, holy life.

There was not a coarse thread, not a flaw, in His whole person. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26).

- Little children were drawn to Him.
- His enemies had to bring in false witnesses to accuse Him.

- Pilate had to admit that he found "no fault" in Him.
- The centurion at the cross testified, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54).

Every step of His earthly life, from Bethlehem's manger to the cruel cross, verified the words which His Father in heaven spoke on two occasions, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

2. The Four Pillars.

The beautiful hanging that formed the gate was upheld by four pillars set up in sockets of brass, and was fastened to the pillars with hooks of silver.

Again, we are reminded of the lessons we learned from the pillars and sockets that upheld the white linen curtain which formed the court; for here also the brass speaks of judgment of sin at the cross; the silver, of redemption in Christ Jesus.

The fact that there were four, and only four, pillars which upheld the gate reminds us of the four Gospel records of the life of Christ on earth, His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John gave us the story of Him who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

My friend, have you ever wondered why there are four Gospels? Why not just one?

They tell the same story of our crucified and risen Lord. It is a wonderful fourfold portrait of Christ that the Holy Spirit has given us in the four records of the evangelists; and, while all tell the same story, yet each has a particular purpose in mind, presenting Christ in a way that fits that purpose.

We cannot dwell long here upon this comparison of the four Gospels, but a brief glimpse at each should help us to understand better how to study these much loved books.

Matthew wrote particularly for the Jews, presenting Christ as their King.

He quoted more freely from the Old Testament than any of the other three, because he was proving that Jesus was Israel's promised Messiah. Matthew traced Christ's genealogy from Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, and through David, the king. He told of the visit of the wise men and their gifts to the Child Jesus, the King of Jews. Matthew set forth the laws of the kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount; the mysteries of the kingdom in the thirteenth chapter; the Olivet Discourse, pointing on to the end of the age and the second coming of the King in glory.

These are just a few of the facts about this first Gospel record that may well have been foreshadowed in one of the four pillars that up held the gate of the Jewish tabernacle.

Mark emphasized that part of our Lord's life on earth which tells us that He was the faithful Servant of the Lord.

The key words are "straightway," "immediately," "forthwith," words that remind one of prompt obedience to His Father's will. The key verse is Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Mark gives no record of the genealogy or birth of Christ; for who asks for these things concerning a servant? He portrays the One who unceasingly went about "doing good," ministering to the needs of others, ever demonstrating His mighty power. This is not to say that Mark did not present Christ as the King of the Jews as well. Indeed, all four of the Gospel writers gave abundant testimony that Jesus was eternal God, perfect Man, King of Israel, Servant of God and Saviour of the world. But each of the four emphasized some particular phase of His Person and work, that we might get a more complete portrait of Him. Surely Mark is as one of the four pillars at the gate of the Jewish tabernacle.

Luke presented Christ as the perfect Son of Man.

Therefore, he gave His genealogy through Mary, tracing it back to Adam, the father of the human race. It was Luke who told of the humble shepherds, the lowly manger, the Boy Jesus in the temple. Luke recorded many of the parables which tell of the compassion of the seeking Son of Man. Let us not forget that Luke magnified the Lord Jesus as eternal God, but he dwelt particularly upon His sympathetic humanity, as the seeking Saviour of men. Luke may have been in the mind of God as symbolized by one of the four pillars in the Jewish tabernacle.

John plainly stated his purpose in verses 30 and 31 of the twentieth chapter; for he wrote to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was the eternal God.

The deity of Christ is set forth in John as in few books of the Bible, plainly, repeatedly, forcefully. John gave no record of the genealogy or birth of Jesus, because God has neither beginning nor ending. He opened his Gospel with the majestic statement, "In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God."

John has preserved for us seven of the most profound of our Lord's discourses, all emphasizing His deity:

- "The New Birth";
- "The Living Water";
- "Christ's Equality with the Father";
- "Christ, the Bread of Life";
- "Christ, the Light of the World";
- "Christ, the Good Shepherd"; and
- "His Farewell Discourse to His Disciples."

John gave us the seven statements of our Lord, declaring that He is the great "I AM" who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. It was John who told us of His raising Lazarus after he had been dead four days. No wonder Christians love the book of John! It exalts the Lord in all His deity and glory! And it may well answer to one of the four pillars in the gate of the Jewish tabernacle.

3. The Only Gate.

We have already seen from this study that there was only one gate of entrance into the tabernacle; and that the penalty of death faced any who might attempt to approach God in any other way. We have also spoken constantly of the fact that Christ is the only Way of Salvation, the only Way to the Father and heaven and eternal life. The central theme of all the Word of God is "Christ, the Way."

"The Way of the Cross Leads Home!"

Immediately in front of the gate was the altar of burnt offering. There the blood was shed that pointed on to Jesus, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). As the high priest, on the Day of Atonement passed on into the Holy Place, he sprinkled the blood upon the sacred vessels. As he entered the Most Holy Place, he sprinkled the shed blood on and before the mercy seat. God was teaching His children that "without shedding of blood is no remission" of sin (Hebrews 9:22).

Men may preach a social gospel; they may deny the efficacy of the atoning blood of Christ; but when they do, they are trying to enter a man-made way, which is not the way to God. They are thieves and robbers, who seek to enter the sheep fold without entering the only door, which is Christ. They are "blind leaders of the blind," "wolves in sheeps' clothing." And they are turning the never-dying souls of men away from the only Saviour of sinners; they are serving Satan and all his hosts.

To deny the virgin birth of Christ, His sinless life, His blood atonement, His bodily resurrection, His ascension into heaven, His intercessory work at the throne of grace, and His coming again in power and great glory — to deny these precious truths, is to crucify afresh the Son of God and to trample under foot the precious blood of the covenant (See Hebrews 6:6; 10:29).

4. The Gate for Sinners.

The Jew who entered the gate of the tabernacle took with him an offering, a sacrifice. And by this act he confessed his guilt, his need of a Saviour. There is no other way for sinful man to approach a holy God. "All have sinned"; and all must go to Him in penitence and confession of sin. The Pharisee may pray "with himself"; but his prayer does not reach the throne of God. The publican knows the secret of answered prayer; for he cries out, from his sense of guilt, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

5. A Wide, Low Gate — for All.

The gate of the Jewish tabernacle was twenty cubits wide, but only five cubits high. It met the need of the child, as well as that of the full-grown man. The gate had the same area as the door; yet the door was twice the height of the gate and one-half the width. Why? Because the door was used only by the priests, who represent the saints of God.

The lesson is very plain: The gospel invitation is to all the world. "Whosoever will" may be saved! But how few, comparatively, enter in through the gate and on into the Holy Place of prayer and communion with God by faith in the cross of Jesus and His empty tomb! Yet the wide, low gate of invitation to all the world still stands open. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

6. The Gate to Eternal Security.

Once the sinner entered the gate, bringing his sacrifice that pointed on to Christ, he was surrounded by the fine white linen court — safe because of the atoning blood. Sin had separated him from God; but he confessed his sins, figuratively transferred them to the great Sin Bearer, and was accepted before Him.

The white linen hanging that had shut him out from the court now enclosed him. The righteous law of a holy God which had condemned him was now magnified and vindicated in the Person of the coming Redeemer, in whom the sinner had put his trust.

It had been only a step from without the gate into the court that now enclosed him and spoke to him of pardon and peace and eternal life. It is only a step from darkness to light, an acceptance by faith of the Lord Jesus as the only Saviour of sinners; and the blood-bought sinner saved by grace is eternally secure. His soul is committed to Him who always keeps His promise!

The gate of the tabernacle faced the east, toward the sun-rising. Christ is the source of all light; He is the Light of the World; and "in him is no darkness at all." One day He is coming again as "the Sun of righteousness . . . with healing in his wings" (Malachi 4:2). My friend, do you know Him as your light and life? If not, will you look to Him for salvation, and be eternally secure by faith in His finished work on the cross?

The gate of the Jewish tabernacle has perished centuries ago, but the gate of salvation stands open, inviting you to enter today. The door of the tabernacle has perished; but Christ is the door, "the same vesterday, and today, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

The veil of the temple was rent in twain when He died on the cross; God did that — to open forever the way into His presence, through the cross of Jesus. No longer do we need the gate or the door or the veil of blue, purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen.

The One of whom these beautiful hangings spoke has come!

He has opened "a new and living way" into His presence — the way of the cross. There is "nothing between" the redeemed soul and the Saviour! The gate of salvation, the door of fellowship, the veil that gave access into the very throne room of God — these all stand open, forever open to the sinner who will be saved by God's grace.

Christ is the gate; He is the door; He is the veil!

"Behold the Lamb of God!
Behold, believe, and live:
Behold His all-atoning blood,
And life receive.
"Look from thyself to Him;
Behold Him on the tree:
What though the eye of faith be dim?
He looks on thee."

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